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ABSTRACT

An analysis and discussion are presented of observations of 27 different first lecture situations at the University of New South Wales at the beginning of 1978. The analysis was intended to provide teachers with a range of data about what occurred during first lectures in schools other than their own, and to highlight the potential impact of the occasion on first-year students. Findings suggest that staff devote a large proportion of the first lecture talking to students about the formal requirements of particular courses and the nature of their disciplines, while simultaneously sending cues or covert messages about what students really need to do in order to pass the course and effectively fulfill their roles as students. It is suggested that both the overt and covert messages can be used by students to help them work out a realistic and viable approach to university demands in the academic and other spheres. A checklist of questions for an instructor to consider in preparing the first lecture is included. (Author/PHR)

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The First Lecture: Impact on and Implications for Students Who are New to the University.

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Tertiary Education Research Centre
University of New South Wales

ABSTRACT

This report presents an analysis and discussion of observations carried out on 27 different 'first lecture situations' at the University of New South Wales at the beginning of 1978. The aim of the study was to provide university teachers with a range of data about what occurred during the first lecture in Schools other than their own, and also to highlight the potential impact of this occasion on students who are in the first year of their courses.

The data presented suggests that staff devote a large proportion of the first lecture talking to students about the formal requirements of particular courses and about the nature of their disciplines, but at the same time were either intentionally or unintentionally providing cues or covert messages about what students really ought or need to do in order to pass their courses and to effectively fulfil their role as students. It seems that both the overt and covert messages can then be used by students to help them work out a realistic and viable approach to university demands in the academic and other related spheres.

Introduction: When students enter the university they encounter an environment which is essentially new to them. There are certain demands made upon them - particularly in their academic work - and there are sets of expectations held by staff about how students should fulfil their role. It is also true that students bring with them their own sets of attitudes and expectations about the university[1] about its functions and its aims - and these may or may not coincide with those of the staff who are responsible for teaching them. It is through the interaction of the perceptions held by staff and students that a more realistic and pragmatic basis for action is developed by students. However, it is also the case that staff and students tend not to talk together formally or informally about these perceptions[2] and therefore it is most often in other areas of verbal communication and behaviour that students 'pick up' messages and clues about how staff perceive them and what they expect of them as students. It is often from these more implicit or covert messages that students work out what is required in academic work and what sorts of duties, rights and obligations they have as students.

These sets of informal or implicit messages related to academic work and student behaviour have been termed by Snyder 'the hidden curriculum'. He defines this concept as one where:

> .....students receive one set of official, formal messages - the rules, the prescriptions, the goals. In effect, these are what one must do to pass, to succeed, to move ahead from university to the larger society. At the same time the students are monitoring another, more informal, covert set of cues that tell them what really matters - what in fact leads to rewards and successes.[3]

Since most students are concerned to discover what they need to do in order to pass their courses and to be successful at university, it would be reasonable to assume that they will be alert to both the formal and informal messages given by staff. It is quite often the case, of course, that teachers unintentionally convey messages to students in a variety of ways. It may be the manner in which teachers address students, or the emphasis placed on different aspects of the formal curriculum that give students clues as to what is important in terms of the behaviour and attitudes expected of them. Students can also derive cues from the context in which information is given and even infer information about what leads to success by what is left unsaid by teachers.

The fact that students are 'monitoring' these covert messages or 'hidden curriculum' does not necessarily imply that they are trying to avoid their respon-

sibilities, but rather that if they attempted to meet all the formal requirements expected of them, then the demands being made upon their time and energies would be quite unrealistic, if not impossible to fulfil. The 'hidden' or informal curriculum allows them to operate more effectively and realistically in achieving academic success and teachers assist either intentionally or unintentionally in this process by providing cues or messages for students which enable them to determine an order of priorities to guide their academic activities and to discover what the role of 'student' entails.

It would seem that because first year students experience particular demands that other students do not messages which relate not only to success in academic work but also to working out the definition of the student role become important. Not only, for example, do first years have to cope with the formal academic requirements demanded of all students, but they must also spend time in adjusting to their new environment and working out what their role in the institution is. To enable them to do this they presumably take note of what is said by the teaching staff, as well as by non-teaching staff and peers. And since many students only have direct contact with staff in the formal teaching situation, it is to this area that attention will be turned in this study.

Within the context of the formal teaching situation, one occasion which might be argued has an important impact on students is that of the first lecture. It could also be argued that it is this occasion which sets the 'tone' for the students in their attitudes to and relations with particular Schools and/or Faculties. For example, in a study of departments as a learning milieu for students, Parlett asks in respect of the first meeting between students and staff

> How, then, at this critical moment, does the department present itself? What is the 'tone', the display of priorities, the weight of emphasis? What key statements are made about policy and practice within the department? More speculatively, what first impressions are students likely to carry away with them? What inferences will they draw about how the department operates on the basis of how the first meeting is conducted?[4]

It would be a truism to say that what students derive from the first meeting is a function of what messages staff 'give out' either intentionally or unintentionally, explicitly or implicitly. It was in an attempt to obtain data on this that a study of the first lecture was undertaken by the Tertiary Education Research Centre at the beginning of 1978. In undertaking the study of these "first lecture situations" it was not intended that prescriptive guidelines would be provided or advocated on how the first meeting should be conducted. Rather

the aim of the study was to provide staff with observational data that had been analysed according to categories that were felt to be informative and appropriate, and to allow staff to obtain a picture of what occurrred in a number of different teaching situations other than their own.

It is hoped that the information provided here, together with some questions for staff to consider (see checklist p29) in preparing the first lecture will allow those members of staff who are required to deliver the introductory lecture to select aspects for inclusion which seem most appropriate for their own lecturing style and for the discipline in which they are teaching.

Method

In 1977 staff from the Centre were involved in research which included observation of a first lecture situation. It was evident from this research and talking to students much later in the year that "they remembered the first meetings at their department in great detail for a long time afterwards".[5]

We decided therefore in 1978 to expand our research and look at as many first lectures at the first year level as our resources would allow. Several weeks prior to the commencement of first session we sent a letter to all Heads of School where teaching at the first year level (in reasonable numbers) occurred. The letter requested permission for a member of the Tertiary Education Research Centre to sit in on the first lecture providing that the person giving that lecture was agreeable. Four Schools which refused permission were eliminated from the study, and we were finally able to attend 27 meetings using eight observers to collect the data. Not all Schools gave explicit written approval to attend, but since our letter noted that if we did not receive a formal reply this would be taken as permission, a few Schools were included in the study on this basis. In some instances where permission was formally granted we were unable to observe the first lecture due to lack of personnel since many lectures were scheduled in the same time slot.

We attempted to choose a broad spread of Schools including some with very large first year classes; some which were virtually run on a small group basis; a number from the Arts faculty and a number from science-based faculties (including some from professional faculties). We felt it was particularly important to have a number of schools from the Arts faculty, since unlike many other faculties, there was no specific orientation programme for these students and this was the very first time that students came into formal contact with the academic staff. We are aware that many faculties did have orientation welcomes

for their students and we attended a number of these. However, in some cases it was clear that not all students were present, so that even in these faculties the first lecture of first session was the 'real' introduction to the academic side of university life for many students.

On the basis of the observations made during our research in 1977, a schedule was drawn up and discussed by the staff of the Centre to determine the most appropriate categories for observation. Although it was true that each observer had their own particular approach to observation, the degree of variation was hopefully minimised by discussing the schedule prior to the study and checking with each observer afterwards to clarify points which were felt to be significant. All the results were analysed by catergorising different aspects of the first lecture and in some instances direct quotes were obtained by observers.

It is not the intention of this report to identify either specific lecturers or schools, but rather to identify different approaches used in the first lecture situation.

Description of some first lectures

In this section, a number of short descriptions of various lectures will be presented to provide an integrated account before proceeding to discuss the specific areas covered in the first lectures. The accounts have been chosen to illustrate the fact that approaches were very diverse, not only in the way they were organised, but also in the aspects covered and the manner in which they were conducted. It is not suggested that one approach is better than another since this depends on the context in which they are given. However, by presenting several different accounts, it may be possible for staff to select one approach or different elements from several approaches that they feel are useful in communicating information to students about the policies and practices of the School and the nature of the discipline.

In one Arts subject, for example:

> The lecturer introduced himself by his full name and as Head of School welcomed students to the discipline. He talked about the difficulties of teaching a large number of first year students who were very diverse in background, but indicated that most

staff in the School taught first year so that a link could be made between staff, students and the School as a whole. He spoke briefly about the nature of the discipline, pointing out the sort of work done by his colleagues to illustrate the subject matter and range of the discipline. A member of the student society spoke to students, having been introduced by the lecturer, and told students that the society would encourage anyone with problems to see them. The lecturer then introduced the first year course directors. One of these spoke to students about assessment alternatives, asked students if they had received a hand-out and then explained to them how to enrol in tutorials - which they proceeded to do for the remainder of the lecture. During the lecture many of the staff from the School were present and sat at the front of the lecture theatre in full view of students.

In a science-based subject, the following observations were made:

The lecturer in charge of a first year course with a large number of students spent a little time waiting for students to find places to sit. He asked students if they had cards to fill in for practical classes and said tutors would hand them out to those who hadn't picked them up outside the lecture theatre. He talked about how students would be allocated to practical classes.

The lecturer talked about the nature of the discipline and said some students were disappointed during the year because it wasn't what they had expected. He then related the context of the first year course to other disciplines and told students what followed in subsequent years in the study of the subject, and what was required in terms of level of passes to proceed with the honours or pass courses.

Some time was devoted to talking about textbooks and their relationship to the course material, and students were informed that various articles were held in Open Reserve. He then talked about the times of lectures and that tapes of lectures could be used if students were ill or needed to do revision.

Students were told that they would be asked for their opinion of the course at the end of the year. They were told to refer to the handout for information about scaling of marks and deadlines for assessment. He spoke a little about how much different components of the course were worth and also gave students information about where the School office was located, where notice boards were and what sort of information goes up on notice boards.

In one subject leading to a professional qualification, the following observations were made:

The lecturer arrived carrying a huge pile of papers. He introduced himself by his last name and informed students he would be their lecturer for Session 1. He said he wouldn't do an official welcome because that was the Head of School's job. However, since the Head of School was

because there would be a senior member of staff along on Wednesday to welcome students. He had organised his pile of papers in 8 bundles on the front desk and the class filed past to collect them. He then talked about textbooks and equipment needed for the subject and that Professor X would talk to them about what options were open to them when buying equipment.

Students were informed about the nature of the various assessment components and it was stressed that continuous assessment operated. After talking about assessment he paused and invited questions. None were forth-coming. Students were then asked to select two partners for practicals and tutorials and to fill in cards with the members' names on them. This resulted in some confusion as most students did not know others in the room. After a while he tried to group isolated students. He then collected the cards and read out the names of students in each group. He explained about the first practical exercise students had to do and then talked further about equipment that students required for the course.

He concluded by saying that the school would like students to have a say in how the course was organised. They were to select a fellow-student who would sit on school meetings and report students' complaints.

In another science-based subject the observer noted:

The students arrived early and there was some quiet chatting. There was a general air of waiting for things to start and notebooks were open at a clean page.

The lecturer started on time and outlined that the lecture would be used to introduce students to some staff members and to some basic ideas. He then indicated that the head of school would talk to them and noted the area of specialisation of the head of school. The head of school then talked to the students for about ten minutes, telling them that the School went to a good deal of trouble to help them settle down; that there was a humane, family atmosphere. He told them about tutorials where they were expected to participate and not to take a negative attitude. He suggested that students should make their decision to give up the course in the first week and that they didn't want people in the School who were just filling up a slot. He told them there was an important exam in June; that there was a student society and a sense of belonging to the School. A student-staff committee existed and should be used to express views. He concluded that the School didn't want passive obedience, nor obstreperousness - and hoped the students enjoyed the course.

The first year lecturer in charge then took over, introduced four tutors by name (two of whom were

present), the laboratory manager and a representative from the student society. The latter talked to fellow-students about social activities and the staff-student committee.

Finally the lecturer spent some time talking about what people trained in the discipline were interested in and showed some slides to illustrate some of the basic approaches in the discipline. The tutors then distributed handouts to the students, containing reading lists, the course outline, etc.

In another subject, the observer arrived a few minutes late at the lectures. When she arrived:

The lecturer was talking about assessment. He was telling the students what they needed to do to pass. This involved spending an hour or two over and above what they did at university, regular attendance at classes and persistence. He told students that as attendance falls off so does performance. If students had problems with family or illness, particularly if they missed exams, they should go and see someone about it. There was a good deal of emphasis placed on attendance and punctuality at classes. Students were told they could ask questions in lectures if they didn't understand - but no red herrings. The lecturer pointed out that students who read newspapers or who threw paper darts got what they deserved. He said students would elect a class representative to take problems to the staff, but there had been no problems in the last few years. A field excursion was part of the course and non-compliance with attendance could mean that students' results were withheld.

A detailed explanation of the components of the course and their relative percentage contribution to the final mark was given. The lecturer explained to students that they didn't set long essays because they were difficult to assess and added that students had been known to pass essays on to each other and that it was even possible to buy sets of essays.

The lecturer told students about textbooks and their usefulness in the course and afterwards in practice. He told them where to buy books, or suggested Open Reserve if they couldn't afford them. Dates were given for the exams and the lecturer then paused for questions. One student asked about tutorials and was informed that there were no tutorials, but laboratory classes and the excursion instead.

Finally the lecturer talked about what specialists in the discipline do and gave some instances of what sorts of jobs graduates had

obtained. He said that most graduates are placed in jobs although a few inferior students may have trouble. He concluded by indicating his own experience in the discipline.

In another Arts subject:

The lecturer arrived and began handing out cards for registration and a handout for the course. While students were filling in cards he began. He welcomed students warmly to the subject and explained to them how to fill in the cards. All tutorials times were written on the blackboard for students to choose from, and he indicated that allocations would be on the notice board the next afternoon.

He then introduced the people who would be teaching in the course, all of whom were present and identified for the students, and indicated what their areas of specialisation were. He introduced himself by full name and said he was course director. He talked briefly about lectures and tutorials, telling them that preparation and participation were essential, and that then tutorials would be fun. Assessment was discussed in terms of what work was required and that passing the course was easy if they had kept up with the work. The lecturer then referred to the handout which contained the course outline and the tutorial programme. He then paused for questions. There was one about the hand-out.

Students were asked if they had done a library tour and the lecturer stressed how important it was to do one. He indicated that a person from the library would come and talk to them. He suggested a few basic books that students might like to read if they wanted to.

A representative from the student society arrived at this point and was introduced to the students by the lecturer. The representative talked about the functions of the society and gave fellow-students a handout listing forthcoming events. The lecturer endorsed what the student had said and urged members of the class to come to a wine and cheese night.

He proceeded to talk further about books and said all the books listed on the handout were in Open Reserve and that there was no need for students to buy any at this stage unless they wanted to. Again he called for questions, asked students to hand in their registration cards and told them that last year a student wrote HELP on his card, but that things would get better and better. He finished by indicating that lectures were taped but students could only get access if they could prove they couldn't go because of illness etc. If there were timetable clashes with tutorials they were to see the lecturer. The concluding statement by the lecturer was that he hoped students would find the course exciting and stimulating and the study of the subject rewarding.

The above examples are not, of course, the only ones observed but have been selected because they represent sufficiently diverse approaches to the first lecture to allow a range of choices for those staff members contemplating the most suitable way of conducting this particular meeting in their own discipline.

Within the overall context of these approaches taken by lecturers, there were also features which were common to many of these first lecture situations. These consisted of aspects such as administrtive organisation of students for tutorial classes and coverage of some of the formal requirements in the particular subjects being undertaken. The following section provides a more detailed analysis of these more specific aspects covered in the first lecture.

Structure, Organization and Content of the First Lecture

The material which is covered in this section makes extensive use of both verbatim quotes taken down by observers during lectures, as well as the observers' notes paraphrasing what was said by the lecturers during the first formal meeting with students. No attempt has been made in this section to make interpretations of what was said or to consider what the implications may have been for students. This will be taken up in the final section. However, it is obviously true that the manner in which the data have been categorised for purposes of analysis, and the examples that have been chosen to illustrate these categories reflect the bias of the author. Considerable care has been taken, nevertheless, to provide as much data as possible in each category and not to deliberately omit any data which is relevant. Only in those instances where it is possible to identify a particular subject or School has data been omitted.

This section has been divided into two main areas. Firstly, data dealing with the structure and organisation of the first lectures is provided and this is followed by a fairly detailed account of what was actually covered, i.e. the content of the lecture. In those cases where the content consisted of mainly substantive subject matter very little data is provided because this is obviously one of the areas where particular courses can be identified. (Where the actual words of the lecturer were recorded verbatim by the observer these have been shown in quotation marks).

Structure and Organisation of the First Lecture

This aspect consisted of looking at the basic organisational features of

the lecture situation. We observed, for example, where the lecture was held; how many students approximately were present; and how much of the lecture was devoted to administration and/or content.

It was felt that setting the various messages and the actual content of the first lecture itself within this structured context was important for appreciating the constraints under which both students and staff were operating. If, for example, a lecturer was talking to a class of about one thousand students it would be understandable that the atmosphere in the lecture would per force be less personal than the situation where a class size of about 30 or 40 existed. However, within this broader context it would still be possible for lecturers to adopt personal or impersonal approaches themselves, regardless of the physical and numerical situation.

Table: 1

No. of Students	No. of Lectures
30-50	4
51-100	6
101-250	5
251-500	8
501 or more	4

As can be seen from the above table the majority of lectures to first year students that we observed were undertaken in large lecture theatres and on a few occasions the students were forced to sit on the steps of the lecture theatre because of overcrowding. This prompted comments from the lecturers. One lecturer suggested that attendance at lectures dropped off considerably, therefore "there would be seats for all who wanted them next week". Another lecturer commenting on the fact that the lecture hall was overflowing suggested that there might be a number of evening students present. He added that "people are shopping around I imagine - we don't usually have this problem".

A few members of staff who had about one thousand students in their lecture class also commented on the constraints which this situation imposed. They remarked how difficult two-way communication was under these circumstances and one School in the Arts faculty had attempted to overcome this difficulty by scheduling a more informal meeting between lecturers and students at the end of each block of lectures so that students could ask questions and clarify points

from the lectures. Another lecturer reminded students that in a large lecture theatre there was inevitably a lot of background noise and that this volume adds up and suggested "we will have to have co-operation".

Some other staff with smaller classes (though not of the small group size) also stressed the need for students to come to lectures, to make sure they were on time, or if they did come late to enter quietly and sit at the back.

In the few lecture situations - if they can really be described as lectures - where there were only 30 to 50 students, the context was markedly different. The staff member was able to sit with the students, engage in discussion with them and presumably during the year could get to know his/her students personally.

Another aspect of the lecture which was felt to influence students' introduction to academic life was whether in fact they were exposed to any substantive subject matter on this first occasion, or whether the first meeting was used entirely for administrative matters. Obviously this aspect represents a continuum along which different lecture situations can be placed - ranging from entirely substantive material at one end to entirely administrative matters on the other. However, as our observers did not for the most part actually calculate the percentage of time spent on each aspect, the table below simply shows the two extremes of the continuum and two arbitrary sub-categories along the continuum. It was sufficiently clear from the observers' records approximately what proportion of that total time was devoted to administration and/or content.

Table 2 - Proportion of Administration/Content

	No. of Lectures
All administration	9
Predominantly Admin	12
Predominantly content	5
All content	1

As can be seen from the table the tendency was to spend a greater proportion of the time in the first lecture dealing with administrative matters. The most common activity under this heading was that of registering students for tutorials and/or laboratory classes, and giving information in a more or less detailed way about the nature of assessment in the course.

Other administrative activities involved the distribution of handouts, welcomes by members of the student societies, and information about other organisational features such as when field excursions occurred, what sort of equipment, textbooks and reference books were required by students for their courses.

A significant number of lectures were devoted wholly to administration covering the areas indicated above and also devoting some time to an explanation of what was expected of students in the course, and the structure of the course itself.

The only instance in which the first lecture was devoted entirely to content was a situation where students had already had a Faculty orientation programme and had been introduced to staff. In this case the lecture block was actually a two-hour block with the second half of this period being devoted to administrative matters. Even in those lectures which were substantially devoted to content, some time was taken at the beginning of lectures to cover a few administrative details.

Content of the First Lecture

In this regard we were particularly interested in how staff presented themselves to students and to discover which particular areas were covered in the first lecture. In some instances as noted above (See Table 2) the lectures consisted almost entirely of content related to the discipline and in these cases we were interested in how the content was given and the general messages that students would have derived from this. In most cases, however, some time was devoted to the structure of the course and the formal requirements of the course.

We also noted whether staff introduced themselves to students and how this was done; whether other staff involved in teaching the course were introduced; and whether students were formally welcomed to the university and/or School on this occasion. In addition, we noted whether staff spoke to the students about the nature of the discipline they were about to undertake and whether any specific mention was made of problems that the student might face in the course, or in their first year generally, and what mechanisms were available to deal with these.

Introductions of Staff

It was fairly obvious that the standard practice for the lecturer was to introduce him/herself to the students as one would expect at a first formal meeting. It is therefore a little surprising to find that some lecturers neglected to do this. Presumably this was not deliberate but simply that the person concerned had not thought to do it, or forgot because of other pressures.

Table 3 - Lecturer introduced him/herself

Yes	20*
No	5

* One lecturer had already introduced himself in orientation week; and the other lecturer in our sample could well have introduced himself, but unfortunately our observer arrived from another lecture too late to check this out.

Just as important as whether the lecturer introduced him/herself was how this was done. Many lecturers introduced themselves by first name (including one Head of School), whilst others informed students "I'm Professor...." or "I'm Dr....." or simply wrote their last name on the blackboard.

Another related feature of the first lecture concerned which members of the School actually came to speak to the students on this occasion. The following table shows the status of the personnel present and it should be pointed out that they have only been included in those instances where it was verbally made known to the students - either by self-introduction or introduction by another member of staff - who the speaker was. While on some occasions the observer knew the member of staff and his/her position in the School, it could not be assumed that students were aware of this unless it was made explicit to them.

Table 4 - Status of Staff Introduced to Students

	No. of lectures
Head of School	4
First Year Course Directors	4
Lecturer-in-charge of the course	5
Others (including lecturers; tutors)	9

It should be noted that the categories in the above table are not mutually exclusive. In some cases both the Head of School and the course

director(s) were present and introduced to students, or the lecturer-in-charge of a course indicated that this was his/her position and also introduced other staff teaching in the course to the students. In some cases members of staff such as tutors were present but were not introduced to students, although the lecturer indicated that they were in the lecture hall, or the lecturer gave students the names of the tutors for the course but either they were not physically present or if they were, were not identified for students.

A few lecturers took the opportunity at the first meeting between staff and students to not only introduce members of staff teaching in the course but also spent a little time explaining the particular areas of specialisation of these people to the students.

Some lecturers forgot initially to introduce themselves but did so during the course of the first meeting after being prompted by students. Others did not verbally introduce themselves but wrote their name on the board or overhead projector.

Welcome to Students

Because a number of Faculties had already had programmes for students in orientation week where they were formally welcomed to the university and the Faculty in which they were enrolled, this was not repeated in some first lectures. However, some Schools welcomed their students to a specific subject or discipline in the first lecture reinforcing previous statements of welcome and making it explicit in the more personal and intimate context of the School.

Table 5 - Lecturer welcomes students to school/uni.

Yes	9*
No	11

* Three schools had already done both in orientation week and did not do so again in the first lecture. The other 4 Schools we were unable to get information on due to late arrival coming from other lectures.

One particular lecturer, in fact, used this as the focus to set the whole tone of his lecture - setting the students at ease, creating a warm atmosphere and making the point that learning in his particular discipline would be an enjoyable experience.

He said:

> "I want to welcome you very warmly to (a completely different subject)". When the students gasped in dismay at this he added..."Which this isn't".

He then proceeded amid amusement and laughter to welcome them to the subject they were actually expecting. He continued in a light-hearted and relaxed manner throughout the lecture, stressing at different points that he hoped they enjoyed doing the subject. This, of course, sounded particularly convincing and genuine, since students were in fact enjoying themselves while he was saying this.

Nature of the Discipline

Many lecturers spoke for varying amounts of time about the nature of the discipline students were about to study. In a few instances this constituted almost the entire lecture, while in other cases it was either mentioned in passing or only dealt with at an implicit level - for example when lecturers spoke about the sort of careers that the discipline could lead to.

Table 6 - Lecturer spoke about the nature of the discipline

Yes	17
No	10

Some lecturers used visual media to illustrate their explanation - particularly in subjects with a science base and which were most practically oriented. Other lecturers simply spoke about their discipline but in such a way as to demonstrate enthusiasm and interest in the subject for its own sake, which conveyed to the students that the subject would be an interesting one to study.

A few members of staff explicitly said to the students that they were enthusiastic about the discipline or course, and one lecturer became so involved that he could not refrain from going into some detail about the authors of particular books on the reading list and how they had contributed to the discipline. Another staff member pointed out to students that the course they were undertaking was new and that it would be stimulating and exciting.

One lecturer indicated to students that theirs was a "fascinating profession", but did not suggest that the course itself was exciting or stimulating.

Indeed, he emphasised that what students required to satisfactorily complete the course was persistence and that if students really tried they could pass. He indicated that he had no sympathy for students who didn't try. He talked about the prospects for graduates and indicated that they place all graduates - a few interior students may have troubles but the School on the whole places all graduates.

Another lecturer spent almost the entire lecture talking about the nature of his discipline and explaining to students what the subject had to offer in the way of relevance to current social problems and indicated to students that his was a very important discipline to study. In yet another subject the lecturer concluded his talk by saying "I hope you find this stimulating and the study of (the subject) rewarding."

It seemed that talking about the discipline was an important function of the first lecture - particularly in those disciplines which were new to students (i.e. they had not been studied at High School) and of which they may have had quite vague or misconceived ideas as to what it entailed. It also seemed from our observations that in other subjects it was important especially when students had previously studied it at school to stress that a different approach was required at university. In one particular subject, for example, the lecturer was at pains to point out that one of the jobs of the staff was to help students to learn the discipline "at the university level."

A number of lecturers in fact did stress to students that university was not like school. One observer reported that a lecturer told students in his subject that in essays and exams, "...presenting facts will get you nothing. You must interpret the facts...it's not like high school you have to understand the concepts." He added that in "other subjects (in his Faculty) you are programmed. This one it's up to you. It's impossible to mug up." He also observed that in the Higher School Certificate students are dictated to - that's the natural law - you just write it down. "Here we don't do that".

Similarly, in another subject the lecturer indicated that the staff don't want narratives or collections of facts - they want some arguments. Another lecturer quoted a definition of education from the Oxford English Dictionary as "training of animals to do certain specific tasks". He said that university was not concerned with training anybody but with teaching people how to teach themselves. He called this a "catalysation of the mind."

In contrast to the staff who were intent on impressing on students how essential is was to regard university as something different from school - where they were expected to regard subjects as "less a matter of fact, more a matter of thinking", it was rather novel to find one staff member explaining to his students that their first practical exercise was "something you could teach a chimpanzee to do."

Difficulties and Problems

This aspect of the lecture is a particularly delicate one for staff to deal with. On the one hand once one identifies that students are likely to have problems with a course then this sets up a certain expectation in them that such problems are common and natural. On the other hand, realistically, it is true that many first year students have special problems of adjustment which will be reflected in the way they cope with their courses. To ignore the reality and not to provide students with information about who to see with different sorts of difficulties may have more serious consequences than intimating to students in the first place that problems will arise.

Table 7 - Lecturer gave details about difficulties/problems.

Yes	15*
No	9

* Three other lecturers gave this information to students in the orientation programme.

If it is assumed that students should be aware that they may have difficulties, the important question then is how this is communicated to them in the first formal meeting. As can be seen from the table above, the majority of staff did tell students who they should see and/or what the nature of the difficulties might be. However, the manner in which this was done varied enormously. One lecturer, for example, said that tutors were the people to see and that students should only seek out lecturers if they had a specific problem with a lecture. On the other hand, one lecturer urged students to come and see him because "I'm meant to know how to solve particular problems".

The sorts of problems which lecturers referred to which might face students included difficulties with meeting course requirements, or with specific tasks such as writing essays, understanding material presented in lectures and so forth. One lecturer indicated that many students find the first essay difficult and invited students if they have particular problems to "please feel free to come to us". Another lecturer talked about the "problematic nature" of his discipline and that if students had any questions they should ask them immediately. In another course students were told that they would probably be "terrified" of the subject at this stage but were told to "read a simple book".

One lecturer suggested that it was alright for students to ask questions in lectures if they were not following. He told them to raise their hand and he would stop for a few minutes discourse, but "no red herrings". If students had specialised interests they should be saved to the end of the lecture. This same lecturer told his class that they were to elect class representatives and "if you have any problems go to them". He then remarked that there had been "no problems for the last few years".

In another instance a member of staff devoted considerable time talking to students about appropriate strategies for them to adopt in his course. He suggested that quite often students should work less rather than more and it was really a question of organisation. He advised them to make a precis of lectures as they went along, indicating that "you will not be able to make sense of notes after ten weeks. It will be like Chinese to you". At this stage he had to pause and apologise to a number of Asian students, which caused amusement in the class. He also told the students to remember that they were doing four courses and to make use of lectures and tutorials. They are not just there to laugh at his jokes - but they "should do that as well".

A number of courses at university now have a statistics component, and in one instance the lecturer indicated that the statistics was very elementary requiring early high school mathematics. He suggested that if students were likely to have difficulty to seek assistance but "unfortunately we cannot provide remedial arithmetic" and that students would "have to go and seek help elsewhere". He added that some books were available for students to consult.

One Head of School explained to students about the lines of authority in his School. He explained that "the most important person in your life is your tutor". Failing your tutor if he/she is not available or you don't see eye to eye there are the course directors and failing that "come and see me". He added "I hope this doesn't happen very often, but of course it always happens". He then said there are "people above me but it's not in my interests to tell you who they are". This comment provoked laughter and he went on to explain that there were Deans and others above him.

In another subject the lecturer warned students that the "greatest mistake you can make is to think time is on your side. All those students who make use of the first six weeks will find themselves on time". While students in another course were told that there was a special guidance person to go to when in difficulties. Another Head of School also told students to come and see him any time by appointment.

Formal Requirements

The table below shows the number of lectures during which each of the main aspects of formal course requirements were covered. To illustrate what sort of attention was paid to these each aspect will be dealt with separately and illustrated by data collected by observers.

Table 8 - Aspects covered in the lecture

	Lectures	Tutes/Labs	Textbooks	Library	Assessment
Yes	17	24	18	8	22
No	10	3	9	19	5

a) Lectures: In some cases lectures were talked about in terms of attendance or in terms of how students were expected to conduct themselves in lectures, but the most common mention about lectures was to the effect that they were tape-

recorded and available for student use. In connection with this latter point, one lecturer indicated that not all students could get to lectures, but he didn't want them to use the tapes as a substitute for the live performance. "I much prefer to see people when I come here". Another pointed out that he thought it might be a 'penance' listening to tapes.

While most lecturers who informed students that tapes were made of lectures implied that these were readily available for students to use, in one subject the lecturer told students they would have to prove they couldn't go to a lecture because of illness. They could then ask the lecturer and he would release the tapes. He said students were expected to go to lectures that tapes were not available for revision.

In a few cases the relationship between the lecture material and assessment was stressed to students. One staff member explained that lectures are not the same as reading. "For that reason if you don't make the lecture make sure you get what went on. Lectures cover what goes into the exam". While in another subject students were told that it was very important to come to lectures because the course is based on what is said in the lectures and that they would have problems with the various aspects of assessment if they didn't attend.

Note-taking was also the focus of some lecturers' comments about lectures. A few suggested that students shouldn't try to take everything down. One person said "I don't dictate", although in fact he did talk very slowly and clearly. He added later that "when I lecture for an hour - and I do lecture for an hour - you can't get it from books". He explained to students that he made a series of logically interconnected points in lectures and they should try and get the general form of the argument. He also told students that their lecture notes just before the exam "is the greatest ally you have. They are your notes".

Another staff member also urged students not to take too many notes and actually stopped at one point to indicate to students the sort of notes they should have up to that time. He gave "key words" that students could hang on to and suggested lectures would be sign posts for their research.

In one subject students were informed that "lectures are not what university is about but we are stuck with them. Therefore tutorials are very important". While in contrast to this a group of students were told that university regulations required 80% attendance at lectures. The lecturer indicated that he didn't enforce this but sends letter if students stop coming and the student is likely to fail. He also told students to be punctual. "If you are late sit

quietly at the back" and added that students who read newspapers or threw darts got what they deserved.

In one other instance a lecturer talked about the compulsory nature of lecture attendance. "Lectures are compulsory but we don't know if you are here or not. So it doesn't matter, but then again it does matter because lectures are pertinent to the course, that is to tutorial discussion and assessment, therefore you should come to the lectures".

b) Tutorials/Laboratories: As was noted earlier in the paper, much of the administrative content in the lecture consisted of getting students into tutorial/laboratory groups. In many cases students spent some time filling out registration cards indicating preferences for days and times. Students were also told when and where the allocations would be displayed. Some staff also took this opportunity to stress the importance of participation and how important tutorials were in the course as well as what the function of these formal classes were. For example, tutorials are "run almost like a lecture... as a forum to expand the lecture material". Or "tutorials - not a forbidding atmosphere...I think you will find them enjoyable experiences". This lecturer went on to say that he wanted to innovate in tutorials with debates etc., and asked students to think about this and they would talk about what sorts of things "we can do in tutes". He stressed that it was important for students to read for tutorials particularly the discussion leader. If students don't prepare beforehand it is "not worth fronting up".

Another lecturer also talked about the need for student preparation. "Let me spend a little time talking about tutorials". First he indicated that all groups would try to work through a series of discussion questions for consistency and then emphasised that students should read for tutorials otherwise there would be "awkward moments". He told students there would be more emphasis on covering the reading and that marks would be allocated for class participation.

A few staff also pointed out that tutorials were the place where staff members got to know the students. One person said that this is the only time that "we have direct contact with students". Another said that "What tutors come to say in examination meetings is important...you need a close working relationship". He also said that "participation in tutorials means a great deal to me" and added that "I don't want to control tutors any more than I want to control you". One member of staff talked about tutorials as almost a "family venture" and another that students must participate "spiritually as well as physically".

In one subject the lecturer described tutorials as small groups where people discuss "significant problems". He urged students to participate and read well in advance. In this case they have a "good time" and we "enjoy ourselves tremendously". If students don't read then they have a boring and unhappy time. A final example relates to laboratories. The lecturer here told students to be punctual at these sessions. He said they could leave early but that would be "cutting into" their own time. He remarked "you pay to be here".

Textbooks: This aspect consisted principally of informing students how useful particular books were or giving them information on when or where to buy books. In one course, for example, students were told which books to buy and "to buy them straight away". Another group of students were told that the text for the course was a paperback costing $16.90 and the lecturer said "I advise you all to buy it". He also remarked that another text which had been used in the past had been dropped because it was too expensive and that students would be given two booklets and a handout instead. He added that the importance of textbooks is not that it covers all lectures, because it is difficult to get a textbook "tailor made" to the course. However, "Areas that have proved difficult in the past are covered in this textbook". He said the textbook is not just for facts, but should give some idea of what the subject is all about.

In one course the lecturer mentioned the name of the textbook and said that it is "not really a suitable one....can as an alternative forget about a text-book and rely on the notes that I hand out...that's what I would do". And another lecturer said students must buy the text-book although it does not cover the course, but he would try to refer to it.

One member of staff referred students to a rather long list of books in a handout and said we "expect you to buy all of them". In response to students amazement he added "we don't expect you to buy any books at all at this stage". He said that if students had money and wanted to buy some he suggested they buy... (gave the reference). He pointed out that all the books on the list were in open reserve in the library.

d) Library: Except in a few instances, all references to the library were in connection with letting students know that certain textbooks or other reading material was located in open reserve. However, one lecturer advised his students to also go to the section where the books for the subject were located (he actually gave them the appropriate catalogue numbers) and to browse through the books to give them an idea of the nature of the discipline. Another staff

member stressed that most of the learning in his course would take place in tutorials and in the library.

In one course, the observer noted that the lecturer had arranged to take students to the library in the afternoon and also told students about the Faculty library and urged them to use their local libraries as well. In another course, it was evident that the staff had gone to some trouble to ensure that students became familiar with how to use the library. The lecturer asked students in the lecture if there was anyone who had not done a library tour. When a large number of students raised their hands he urged them to do a tour that week. He then asked "Anyone undertaken one? Say yes. Helpful ? Say yes!" He also indicated that one of the reader assistance librarians would come and talk to them and remarked "You see what a tight unified package we are presenting to you?" and added that part of the tutorial programme for the first four weeks would be devoted to talking about the library as well as how to take notes, methods of study etc.

The only other explicit comment about the library occured in one subject where the lecturer had explained that the textbook was not very good and said "you will probably have to go to the library to read up".

Assessment: The main thrust of the discussion concerning assessment fell into two broad categories - one where the lecturers stressed how easy it was to pass their course if students kept up with the work, and the other where lecturers stressed how many students tended to fail their subject for a variety of reasons. In some cases a considerable amount of time was spent talking about the different tasks students had to complete which were assessable and in most cases this information also appeared in student handouts. For example, one lecturer told students that there was continuous assessment consisting of 5 practicals, 4 quizzes and 3 tutorial problems. He said "a word of warning, the most damaging are the short quizzes" and in references to the practicals said "you will have to pull your weight on these".

Another lecturer told students that their course included a three day field trip to a country area and that non-compliance with attendance on field excursions may mean that their results are withheld. Another group of students were informed that in their subject last year 30% had failed and that a follow-up revealed that they had taken the course too lightly.

On the other hand some lecturers tried to allay students' anxieties about assessment.

> "To pass you must do all the work outlined...This course is fairly easy to pass. We hate failing people. The only people we fail are geniuses! So you can enter the course and enjoy it!"

This lecturer went on to say that only 4 students failed the course last year and this was due to the students dropping out of the course.

One School had set a variety of assessment options for its students and the lecturer pointed out that "not all of us are gifted at expressing ourselves in writing or orally. There are other idioms of expression". He indicated that staff were interested in the subject matter and how students treated it and that it was their choice of idiom. He suggested that it was much simpler to set an essay or an exam, but it suited the interests of students better to be able to choose.

Other lecturers suggested "it is not whether you pass, but how well you pass" or "every person who has kept up has either already passed or is within two or three marks. The final exam is merely to sort out the high distinctions from the distinctions"! This lecturer told students there should be no anxiety about the exam. "It is really to check out that you have listened to what was said during the year".

One lecturer stated simply "some people are going to pass, some are going to fail", but added that "on the whole I am a liberal marker. I'm less concerned with what you argue for than the way you argue." And students in one science-based course were informed "another warning, with practical classes you have to take field notes...neatly..the marker is... rather thorough. (But) if you get a poor mark for the first one or two exercises don't shoot yourself!" He explained that the assignments were weighted so that the later ones counted more.

Other aspects relating to assessment covered the need for students to get work in on time. A few lecturers spoke about deadlines.

> "Deadlines are important. After the deadlines tutors have one or two weeks to hand them back. After that no essays are accepted. If there is a medical reason see your tutor and take care of it in advance."

Another lecturer said...."make every effort to get it in on time" and suggested that students who were late handing in essays had an "unfair advantage over people who put them in on time."

Related to assessment less directly was the comment by one member of staff who explained to students that they must collect a receipt when essays are handed in and also to take a copy of essays, as it had been known to loose essays with subsequent chaos.

The final area dealing with assessment was related to some discussion in lectures about student involvement in deciding assessment procedures. One lecturer informed students that "in the first tutorial we will ask you what sort of assessment you want". And another said "assessment of course is really a matter of negotiation". He said "my preferred method" is 60% exam and 40% tutorials and essays. And finally one lecturer announced to the class that this year the Students Union was concerned particularly with the issue of assessment if any of the first years had any ideas on this.

Discussion

From an analysis of the data it appeared that the first lecture was fulfilling two different functions for students. On the one hand students were being introduced to particular subjects or disciplines which they were about to study, and on the other they were being given information and messages about their own role in the School and about what was required of students in order to successfully complete the course. In some cases one of these aims appeared to receive more emphasis than the other and, as has been noted earlier in this paper, some Schools had actually covered these aspects during the Orientation week welcome for new students. Although these broad aims or features were identifiable, the way in which each of these was achieved differed from School to School.

Introduction to the discipline

Students were introduced to particular disciplines in a number of different ways. In some cases the lecturer gave a brief description of what the subject matter of the discipline was, or gave some examples of areas in which staff in the School were researching. A few lecturers illustrated some of the basic aspects of the subject via visual media - e.g. slides; short films; while a few delivered a lecture which gave the students the flavour of the subject and how it was approached by someone qualified in the field. A further way in which students were told about particular subjects or disciplines was by the lecturer giving information on the sort of jobs and careers that graduates of the School had obtained in the past.

Providing students with some details about disciplines in the first lecture can stimulate their interest and can convey to them the exciting nature of subjects that they may have had little knowledge of, or which had been approached quite differently at high school. Similarly, if as one lecturer suggested students are 'shopping around' then the manner in which the discipline is portrayed may help students to make a decision as to whether to pursue a particular subject.

Further information about the subject can be, and in some cases was, given in talking about the content of textbooks and readings; via details in handouts to students, and by talking about the further areas of study that students pursue in the later years of the course.

Student role:

The second main area which was covered in the first lecture related to explicit and implicit messages about what was expected of students by the staff of the different Schools. Again the way in which this was conveyed and the actual expectations expressed by the lecturers varied from subject to subject. It was almost universal, for example, that one of the ways in which this was conveyed to students was implicitly through lecturers discussing the formal requirements of the course. Students presumably were expected to comply with these formal requirements and in this sense one of the aspects of their role as students was to fulfil the obligations demanded by the staff for each course. This was particularly apparent in the discussion of assessment in different subjects. In some instances the emphasis on assessment gave the impression that students had to work consistently and conscientiously in order to pass the subject and thereby maintain their status as students. In other cases assessment was discussed in the context that it was not a vital part of the course because nearly everybody passed and therefore students should pay attention to learning about and enjoying the discipline.

Students were also given explicit messages about their roles when staff talked about tutorials. Students were led to expect to have to actively participate in tutorials, laboratories and practical exercises and in some instances preparation for tutorials was heavily emphasised. It was clear by the way in which some lecturers spoke that students were being geared up to take responsibility for their own learning and this was explicitly stated by some lecturers. It was also expressed in such terms as 'university is not like school' or that students must learn to think independently and learn to organise their own activities in order to meet the formal requirements of the school.

In a few cases it was clear that staff were telling students that they were interested in, and indeed welcomed, the students active participation in contributing to the evaluation of subjects they were about to study. A few lecturers advised students that their opinion of the course would be sought while others explained the existence of staff-student committees where problems or complaints about the course could be formally conveyed to staff. It could be argued that in these cases the students were being invited to fulfil the role of constructive critic of the teaching and curriculum of the School and thereby to contribute to the School's development.

Another set of messages in the first lecture related to the nature of staff-student relations in the various schools and what part students were expected to play in these. In some cases students were actively encouraged to participate in the 'life' of the School and this was reinforced in a few instances via the representatives of the student societies. These representatives encouraged new students to attend functions and mix with the staff. A less informal aspect of the staff-student relations was covered in many of the first lecture situations. This related to staff encouraging students to come and see them about particular difficulties they were experiencing in the various areas of their course, or simply to come and talk to them about general matters. The role of student vis a vis staff is an important area and many staff gave students the necessary information to initiate contact with the teaching staff.

In virtually every first lecture situation students would have derived some idea about how their role was perceived by the staff. It would seem that this is also an important function of lectures given to students in their first few days at university. It might be expected that students would be particularly sensitive to such messages, given that they are entering a new institution where they must learn fairly quickly how they need to act in order to adapt successfully to the new demands and expectations.

Conclusion:

One thing that should be mentioned at this point is that what the lecturer says in the first lecture does not necessarily reflect what actually happens in practice in the School/Faculty. However, since on the other hand, there is no reason to believe that it doesn't, then it may be useful to consider that the first lecture provides staff with an important opportunity to set the 'tone' for students about the nature of the discipline they will be studying.

Similarly, the first lecture may provide students with some idea of how the staff perceive them and their role in the School as well as giving some idea about whether the course will be interesting, exciting and stimulating. Statements on these aspects by the lecturer may well influence the attitudes and motivation of students in their approach to a course.

Simons et al., note the following points in respect of the first lecture:

> .....first, that introducing the new students to the department is probably - from the student's point of view - more significant than the large institution-wide induction; second, that it is an impressionable moment in the total academic life of the students and that what the department stresses (e.g.informality or 'how to avoid academic failure') may well have lasting impact; and third, that there is considerable scope for originality in devising activities of (sic) functions that are instructive, pleasurable, and encourage students to take an active ar lively part in them."[6]

From the point of view of the students, the information and 'messages' that they derived from the first lecture will assist them in working out what is expected of them as students. They will probably obtain a general impression of how the School operates and depending on what the lecturer emphasises will probably work out what the staff think are the important aspects of the course they will be studying.

This observational study has established that the manner in which staff approach the first lecture for first year students is quite diverse. However, it is also apparent that there are common themes that many lecturers addressed themselves to in the course of the lecture, differing only on the emphasis and manner in which these were conveyed. The report has attempted to highlight some of these similarities and differences and to alert staff to the potential impact that the first formal meeting may have on students who are new to the university.

CHECKLIST OF QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER IN PREPARING THE FIRST LECTURE

1. How should I introduce myself? Should I write my name on the blackboard/ overhead projector? Does my name appear on a handout that I can refer students to? Do students know my function in the School - e.g. Head of School; course director; lecturer-in-charge of the course? Should I give students my room number and directions on how to get there? Should I tell them when I am available for consultation?

2. Should I ask other members of staff teaching in the course to be at the first lecture? Should I ask the Head of School to be present? Should I introduce these members of staff to new students? Should I ask them to address the students?

3. Should I welcome students to the School/University/Discipline? Has this been done during orientation week? If so, should I repeat the welcome in the first lecture?

4. Should I cover administrative matters in the first lecture? e.g. should I arrange students into tutorials? Should I talk about the formal requirements of the course? Should I talk about tutorial preparation and participation? Assessment? Attendance at classes?

5. Should I introduce students to the nature of the disciplines in the first lecture? Should I devote the whole lecture to this? How can I best do this? Should I use audio-visual material? Should I talk about the areas of research relevant to the discipline? Should I talk about the work that graduates of the School engage in?

6. Should I alert students to the sorts of problems they might face in first year? Which problems should I tell them about? Should I indicate who they should go to with problems? Should I talk about the sorts of problems that students have had in previous years? Should I alert students to the numbers who fail this course? Should I encourage students to come and talk to staff even if they don't have problems?

7. Should I talk to students about using the library? Should I arrange a library tour? Should I invite someone from the library to talk to students in class?

8. Should I prepare a handout for students? What information should I include? Should I outline the aims of the course? Should I give lists of textbooks or references? Should I outline how and when they will be assessed? Should I include some information on study skills - e.g. how to write an essay?

9. Should I invite students to participate actively in the formal and informal activities of the School? Should I tell them about staff-student committees? Should I invite a representative of the Student Society to talk at the first lecture? Should I encourage students to participate in social activities?

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